



December 2006

## Juvenile Court Judicial Officers: 2006 Summary Data

As part of the Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment project (JDCA), the Administrative Office of the Court's (AOC's) Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) sent a mail-in survey to all judicial officers who had regular assignments in the juvenile court in the summer of 2006.<sup>i</sup> In this *Research Update*, we present survey results about juvenile court judicial officers' background, tenure, and judicial education. The survey questions that focused on juvenile delinquency matters will be presented in future publications. The data presented here for the 214 judicial officers assigned to the juvenile court shows that most had professional experience in juvenile matters before their first assignment, they receive yearly judicial education, and that the median length of juvenile assignment exceeds three years.

### Judicial Officers in Juvenile Court

Of the 214 judicial officers (JOs) assigned to the juvenile court as of June 2006,<sup>ii</sup> 66 hear dependency but not delinquency cases, 72 hear delinquency but not dependency cases, and 76 hear both case types (see chart on page 3).<sup>iii</sup> Seventy-two percent hear juvenile matters full time and the rest hear juvenile as well as other types of cases. Juvenile delinquency assignments are more likely to be full time than are juvenile dependency assignments. Fifty-one percent of juvenile delinquency assignments and 40% of juvenile dependency assignments are full time. Based on the typical amount of time judicial officers report that they spend on dependency and delinquency matters, we estimate that statewide there are 84 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions serving juvenile dependency and 95 FTE positions serving juvenile delinquency.<sup>iv</sup> Sixty-four percent of those with regular juvenile assignments are judges and 36% are subordinate judicial officers.

One hundred eighty-seven judicial officers responded to the survey. Those respondents spend a median 3.9 years in their dependency assignments and 2.8 years in their delinquency assignments. That difference is due to the longer tenures of subordinate judicial officers (SJOs), who are more likely to staff juvenile dependency than juvenile delinquency courts. On average, the length of a juvenile assignment is 2.8 years for judges and 5 years for subordinate judicial officers, which achieves the minimum recommended assignment length of three years.<sup>v,vi</sup> The length of current juvenile assignments ranges from 1 month to 20 years and 3 months for judges, and 1 month to 32 years for subordinate judicial officers. Some judicial officers are in their second or more juvenile assignment. The median number of years spent in the field across all assignments is 4.2 in dependency and 4.0 in delinquency. The median total years of bench experience is 12.5 for all respondents, 10.7 years as judges, and 8.7 years as subordinate judicial officers.<sup>vii</sup>

Juvenile assignments vary by type of judicial officer. Judges are more likely to hear juvenile delinquency cases than they are to hear juvenile dependency cases, and they are more likely to be responsible for multiple case types. SJOs are more likely to be assigned to juvenile dependency than

juvenile delinquency cases, and they are more likely to hear one case type. For instance, 23% of the judges in the juvenile court hear juvenile dependency but not juvenile delinquency matters, compared to 44% of the subordinate judicial officers. Fifty-eight percent of judges hear dependency and 77% hear delinquency cases (42% hear both), while 68% of subordinate judicial officers hear dependency cases and 55% hear delinquency cases (24% hear both). Judges are more likely to work in juvenile court on a part-time basis than are SJOs, in part because they are proportionally more likely to be located in smaller courts, where it is typical to be responsible for multiple case types.

## Background of Judicial Officers

Before becoming judicial officers, 71% of the respondents had prior professional experience in juvenile matters, almost exclusively as attorneys in juvenile court. Many respondents had more than one prior role in the juvenile court. In descending order, the most likely prior professional roles were as child's delinquency attorney (34%), child's dependency attorney (29%), parent's dependency attorney (28%), delinquency prosecuting attorney (16%), and dependency county counsel (8%). Subordinate judicial officers were more likely than judges to have had any prior professional experience in juvenile matters (82% and 65%, respectively), although the figures are high for both groups.

Nearly all judicial officers received specialized education in juvenile matters before beginning or within the first year of their first assignment (87% in dependency and 81% in delinquency). Early continuing education is almost universal for more recent appointments. Respondents also reported receiving a median of 18 hours of continuing education in juvenile matters per year after their appointments began; the top one-quarter received 32 hours or more of continuing education.

## About Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment and the Survey

The Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts is undertaking a comprehensive assessment of juvenile delinquency court in California. The project is assessing hearings and other court processes; court collaboration with justice system partners; placement, treatment, and supervision options for youth; perspectives of parties and interested groups; education and training; and customer service. The resulting information will be used to make recommendations for changes in laws and rules of court; improvements in hearing management, judicial oversight, court facilities, and other aspects of court operations; changes in judicial and attorney caseload; and improvements in court services for youth, families, victims, the community, and other parties. CFCC is conducting a series of studies—some on a statewide basis and some in select jurisdictions—in order to examine the many areas within the mandate of this assessment. Results of the assessment will be released in a series of reports during the study period and in a final report and recommendations in the summer of 2007.

The 2006 CFCC Survey of Juvenile Court Judges, Commissioners, and Referees surveyed all juvenile court officers about their current appointment and professional background, but surveyed only those who hear delinquency matters for their assessments of substantive issues affecting the juvenile court and its stakeholders, such as crossover processes, hearing delays, quality of probation and attorney work, the availability and quality of sanctions and services, and the resource needs of the courts and other agencies. It is the first statewide survey of juvenile delinquency judicial officers ever conducted by the AOC. Juvenile dependency judicial officers were surveyed for the first time in 2004, and

findings from that survey were presented in several publications, including *Research Update: Background of Judicial Officers in Juvenile Dependency* (December 2005). The AOC is grateful to survey participants and to the court staff who have supported these surveys.

<b>Summary Data from the 2006 CFCC Survey of Juvenile Court Judicial Officers</b>					
Juvenile Assignments (n=214)			Judicial Officers' Background (n=187)		
	Percent	Number	<b>Job Tenure Data (median years)</b>		
Dependency only	30.8	66		Percent	Number
Delinquency only	33.6	72	Current dependency assignment	--	3.9
Both	35.5	76	Current delinquency assignment	--	2.8
Total JOs in juvenile court	--	214	All dependency assignments	--	4.2
Respondents to survey	87.4	187	All delinquency assignments	--	4.0
			Judge	--	10.7
<b>Judicial Officer Title</b>			Subordinate judicial officer	--	8.7
Presiding Judge, Sup. Court	8.4	18	Judicial officer	--	12.5
Judge	56.1	120	Judges who were once SJOs	10.3	--
Commissioner or Referee	35.5	76			
			<b>Prior Professional Background</b>		
Time Commitments			No other professional role	29.1	62
<b>Juvenile</b>			Child attorney, dependency	29.1	62
Less than 1/4 time	2.5	5	Child attorney, delinquency	34.3	73
1/4 time	11.3	23	Parent attorney, dependency	27.7	59
Less than 1/2 time	2.9	6	County counsel, dependency	8.0	17
1/2 time	2.5	5	Prosecutor	16.4	35
Less than 3/4 time	0.5	1	Probation officer	4.2	9
3/4 time	3.9	8	Social worker	1.4	3
More than 3/4 time	4.4	9	Guardian ad litem	1.9	4
Full time	72.1	147	Pro tem	6.1	13
Missing	--	10	Other	5.2	11
			<b>Judicial Education</b>		
<b>Dependency</b>			Before or in year 1, dependency	87.3	103
Less than 1/4 time	25.7	35	Before or in year 1, delinquency	80.8	101
1/4 time	4.4	6	Hours last year (median)	--	18
Less than 1/2 time	9.6	13			
1/2 time	11.0	15			
3/4 time	9.6	13			
Full time	39.7	54			
Missing	--	10			
<b>Delinquency</b>					
Less than 1/4 time	20.7	29			
1/4 time	5.7	8			
Less than 1/2 time	7.1	10			
1/2 time	10.7	15			
3/4 time	4.3	6			
Full time	51.4	72			
Missing	--	10			

Note: Data in the first column is 214 judicial officers in juvenile court. Data in the second column is the subset of 187 who responded to the survey. Judicial education data were available for 118 of the 142 JOs who hear dependency matters and 125 of the 148 JOs who hear delinquency matters.

<sup>i</sup> A copy of the survey can be found here:

[www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/programs/description/delproj.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/programs/description/delproj.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> Six other respondents hear juvenile cases on only a backup basis. We exclude them from this analysis because their time commitment to the juvenile court is intermittent, and it is likely that others in a backup role were missed in compiling the survey mailing list.

<sup>iii</sup> One-third also heard nonjuvenile matters, either as a regular appointment or on a backup basis.

<sup>iv</sup> One hundred eighty-seven out of 214 judicial officers (or 87.4%) responded to this survey and reported their time commitment to the juvenile court. For 18 of the 27 nonrespondents, we learned this information by speaking with the court. For the remaining 9, we estimated their time commitment based on the size of the county.

<sup>v</sup> Cal. Stds. Jud. Admin. 24(a): The presiding judge of the superior court should assign judges to the juvenile court to serve for a minimum of three years. Priority should be given to judges who have expressed an interest in the assignment.

<sup>vi</sup> As judicial rotations are clustered in January and the survey was fielded in June, it is probable that the 2.8 figure is an underestimate.

<sup>vii</sup> The difference between 12.5 and 10.7 is due to the total years of experience of judges who had previously been subordinate judicial officers.

## **Judicial Council of California Administrative Office of the Courts**

Hon. Ronald M. George  
*Chief Justice of California  
and Chair of the Judicial Council*

William C. Vickrey  
*Administrative Director of the Courts*

Ronald G. Overholt  
*Chief Deputy Director, Administrative Office of the Courts*

Diane Nunn  
*Director, Center for Families, Children & the Courts*

Charlene Depner  
*Assistant Director, Center for Families, Children & the Courts*

Lee Morhar  
*Assistant Director, Center for Families, Children & the Courts*

### **Production of This Report**

Iona Mara-Drita, Author  
*Senior Research Analyst*

Amy Bacharach  
*Research Analyst*

Audrey Fancy  
*Senior Attorney*

LaRon Hogg  
*Research Attorney*

Don Will  
*Supervising Research Analyst*

Danielle Tate  
*Administrative Coordinator*



CFCC generates and distributes research-based information that has promise for improving the quality of justice and services to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, families, and self-represented litigants in the California courts and nationwide. To learn more about its work and to see more research updates, visit [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/).

455 Golden Gate Avenue, Sixth Floor  
San Francisco, California 94102-3688  
E-mail: [cfcc@jud.ca.gov](mailto:cfcc@jud.ca.gov)

*The views in this research summary are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Judicial Council of California.*